HENRI KOUAM FOUNDATION

POLICY BRIEF | AGRICULTURAL TRADE & REGIONAL INTEGRATION | CEPI 2026

Trade in Agricultural Products between *Cameroon and Central Africa*

Haiwang Djamo

National Coordinator & Research Analyst, CEPI

90%	226M+	24%
of cross-border agricultural flows are informal	people in Central Africa rapidly urbanising	agricultural production shortfall in the region

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In Central Africa, most foodstuffs — including rice, cereals, and milk — are still imported despite the region's significant agricultural potential and a structural 24% production shortfall. Cameroon's position as the regional agricultural hub makes its trade with neighbours essential for food security.
- Agricultural trade between Cameroon and its neighbours remains largely unstructured and informal — with up to 90% of cross-border flows in certain areas outside official channels — limiting its visibility, effectiveness, and the tax revenue it generates.
- Regional integration efforts, particularly through the AfCFTA, offer new opportunities to strengthen these trade links — but realising their potential requires complementary reforms in infrastructure, trade facilitation, and standards compliance.

Haiwang Djamo

National Coordinator & Research Analyst, CEPI

Cameroon Economic Policy Institute

— THE ESSENCE OF CHANGE —

Introduction

In Central Africa, most foodstuffs consumed — such as rice, cereals, and milk — are still imported, even though the region has significant agricultural potential despite a 24% production shortfall. Agricultural trade between Cameroon and its neighbours is therefore essential for ensuring food supplies for the population — facilitating the movement of staple foods and helping meet rapidly growing demand linked to urbanisation and population growth.

However, this trade remains largely unstructured and informal, which limits its visibility and effectiveness. It is also hampered by inadequate infrastructure and high transaction costs (ISSEA, 2020). Despite this, regional integration efforts — particularly through the AfCFTA — offer new opportunities to strengthen these trade links.

1. Overview of Agricultural Trade between Cameroon and Central Africa

The Main Agricultural Products Traded

The agricultural products most frequently traded between Cameroon and its neighbouring countries are mainly staple foods essential to the daily diet: rice, maize, cassava, plantains, onions, tomatoes, palm oil, and various horticultural products (Nkendah et al., 2012).

Characteristics of Trade

A large proportion of trade between Cameroon and its neighbouring countries does not pass through official channels. Informal trade is estimated to account for up to 90% of cross-border agricultural flows in certain areas — meaning that official statistics significantly underestimate the volumes traded. Markets such as Kye-Ossi, Garoua-Boulaï, and Abang-Minko play important roles as regional trading hubs. Oil-producing economies such as Gabon and Equatorial Guinea import a significant proportion of their food, creating structural demand for Cameroonian agricultural products (Ntsama, 2014).

2. Constraints Limiting Regional Agricultural Trade

Infrastructure Shortfalls and High Logistics Costs

The transport of agricultural produce between production areas and regional markets still relies heavily on a road network that is in poor condition or inadequately maintained. In several strategic corridors — such as Douala–Bangui and Douala–N'Djamena — poor roads significantly increase transport costs and lead to substantial losses, particularly for perishable goods such as tomatoes and fresh vegetables (ISSEA, 2020). The lack of suitable storage facilities forces producers to sell quickly at low prices to avoid post-harvest losses.

Non-Tariff Barriers

Trade between Cameroon and its neighbours continues to be severely affected by the proliferation of road checks, complex administrative procedures, and informal practices that drive up transaction costs (Nyeck, 2021). These obstacles create uncertainty for traders and discourage small-scale producers from accessing regional markets. Non-tariff barriers are sometimes costlier than customs duties themselves, which severely limits the effectiveness of regional trade agreements.

Prevalence of Informal Trade

Over 90% of daily transactions between Cameroon and its neighbours take place outside official channels. The lack of reliable data makes it difficult to plan agricultural and trade policies, while informality deprives governments of significant tax revenue. This can be explained by the simplicity of informal channels, the proximity of border communities, and the high costs of formalisation (Kouam, 2026). However, informality exposes traders to significant risks in terms of legal certainty and access to finance.

Challenges Relating to Standards and Quality

Many agricultural products are sold in their raw state — unprocessed and without added value. Sanitary and phytosanitary requirements, while necessary, are often poorly understood or difficult for small-scale producers to comply with. The lack of integrated agricultural value chains also hinders the development of a regional agri-food industry capable of sustainably supporting trade (Kouam et al., 2025).

---

3. Opportunities to Boost Regional Agricultural Trade

Central Africa has a population of over 226 million, with rapidly growing urbanisation and well-established dependence on imported foodstuffs — representing a structurally promising market for Cameroonian agricultural products. Demand extends to both staple foodstuffs and processed products, offering diversified market opportunities.

Cameroon has significant potential to process its agricultural produce locally and export products with higher added value. The development of agribusiness — particularly in cassava (Djamo, 2026), palm oil, maize, and tomato sectors — could create more jobs and boost regional competitiveness. Furthermore, the AfCFTA is gradually reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, facilitating access for Cameroonian agricultural products to African markets. However, the benefits will depend heavily on governments' ability to implement complementary domestic reforms, particularly in infrastructure and trade facilitation (Kouam et al., 2026).

> **Cameroon's Structural Advantage**
>
> As the geographical and agricultural hub of Central Africa, Cameroon is uniquely positioned to become the region\'s food production and processing centre — if it

invests in the infrastructure and institutional frameworks that transform agricultural potential into export competitiveness.

4. Policy Recommendations

1

Rehabilitate and Modernise Strategic Transport Corridors

Prioritise the rehabilitation of key road links such as Douala–Bangui and Douala–N\'Djamena. Cameroon is expected to asphalt approximately 1,500 km of national roads and 500 km of regional roads to reduce transport costs and losses of perishable agricultural produce.

2

Develop Storage and Preservation Infrastructure

Invest in storage infrastructure — warehouses, cold stores — in production areas and at borders to reduce post-harvest losses and improve the stability of supply in regional markets.

3

Implement a Simplified Trade Regime

Implement AfCFTA\'s simplified trade regime, digitise customs procedures, and limit multiple road checks to reduce transaction costs and make formal trade competitive with informal channels.

4

Encourage Gradual Formalisation of Informal Trade

Offer simple formalisation mechanisms — simplified status for cross-border traders, tailored taxation, one-stop shops — to bring informal trade progressively into official channels without creating prohibitive barriers.

5

Strengthen Producers' Capacity on Quality Standards

Implement training and support programmes to help small-scale producers comply with sanitary and phytosanitary standards, facilitating their access to regional markets and encouraging local processing of agricultural products.

Conclusion

Trade in agricultural products between Cameroon and Central Africa remains constrained by poor roads, high transport costs, and the prevalence of the informal sector. These obstacles hinder the smooth flow of trade and prevent producers from taking full advantage of the regional market. However, demand for food continues to grow, and integration efforts such as the AfCFTA are opening new opportunities. Cameroon and its neighbours would benefit from improving infrastructure, simplifying trade, and encouraging formalisation.

> ***Cameroon cannot feed Central Africa from its agricultural fields alone — it needs roads, cold storage, and simplified customs to turn production potential into regional food security.***

Reference List

- Djamo, H. (2026). Cameroon's cassava value chain can benefit from AfCFTA. GhanaWeb.
- Djamo, H. & Kouam, H. (2025). Making the AfCFTA work for SMEs in Cameroon. CEPI.
- ISSEA. (2020). Rapport trimestriel préliminaire de l'Observatoire des Pratiques Anormales. CEMAC.
- Kouam, H. (2026). A simplified trading regime will unlock AfCFTA trade in Central Africa. CEPI.
- Kouam, H. et al. (2025). Impact of the EPA and AfCFTA on the Cameroonian Economy. CEPI.
- Kouam, H. et al. (2026). The Role of the AfCFTA in Advancing Food Security in Central Africa. CEPI.
- Nkendah, R. et al. (2012). Le commerce transfrontalier informel des produits agricoles et horticoles. ICED.
- Ntsama Etoundi, S. M. (2014). Impact de la rente pétrolière sur la demande des pays frontaliers du Cameroun. CERDI.
- Nyeck Ngimbous, M. (2021). Les enjeux de la facilitation du transit en Afrique centrale. UNCTAD.

About the Author

Haiwang Djamo

National Coordinator & Research Analyst, CEPI

Haiwang Djamo is the National Coordinator at CEPI, responsible for programme coordination, stakeholder engagement, and policy outreach. He has co-authored several CEPI policy briefs on AfCFTA implementation, trade policy, agricultural trade, and Cameroon\'s economic development priorities.

About the Cameroon Economic Policy Institute (CEPI)

CEPI is a think tank at the Henri Kouam Foundation improving economic development through fact-based research, policy advocacy, and events. CEPI has successfully led two verifiable policy reforms.

www.camepi.org | info@camepi.org | Yaoundé, Cameroon